

FIRST FOR A YEAR

THE 1-1 result at Roker Park was the Town's first away draw for more than a year — since they collected a point at Carlisle in October, 1976. The score that day was also 1-1, with Jim Husband the Town's scorer.

The Town then played 23 league matches away without a single draw.

The Carlisle draw was their only away draw in the whole of last season — their other trips produced eight wins and 20 defeats.

After Carlisle they completed their away travels for the season with six wins and nine defeats, and until Saturday's trip to Sunderland the current season's away record read two wins and six losses.



● THE MOMENT THAT STILLED THE ROKER ROAR: Ron Futcher gets in before the opposition to hook the Town into the lead.

SUNDERLAND TAKE ONE POINT

WHEN TEAMS like Sunderland drop a point, at home, despite the backing of some of the best supporters in the land, they can be forgiven for believing that it is a case of a point dropped.

But when the Town left Roker Park on Saturday it was Sunderland's manager and supporters who were grateful for just one point, and pleased that they had seen a point won.

The Town, experimenting with a 4-4-2 formation, had bounced back to the sort of form that rattled Manchester City, and Sunderland manager Jimmy Adamson admitted: "This was one of our worst performances for some time — and you can only play as well as the opposition lets you."

"Luton played very well — they're a good side when they're in the mood, and obviously they were in the mood today."

Sunderland, who had taken ten points from the previous 12, were baffled by the Town's quick attacks on

the break, by some inspired midfield work by Alan West, and by a Town back four which at last looked like a solid unit even without Paul Futcher.

And while skipper West took the eye with some brilliant constructive work to set up Town attacks, Lil Fuccillo was my man of the match, ploughing up and down the length of the field to help out at both ends.

Best of all, it was an all-round effort by the whole team, including David Carr, the defender brought in to do a vital job in midfield.

After some early nervous mistakes, he settled down to turn in a dependable performance.

It all added up to welcome relief for the handful of Town supporters who made the long trek to the North East, fearing the worst and being delighted at seeing the best.

"If Luton had won we couldn't have complained," said Adamson. "But we also had our chances, and the match was a credit to football. Luton had the best of the first half, but we lifted our game in the second."

I wouldn't argue with that professional opinion. The Town took the game to Sunderland from the kick-off: Carr went close to making an early effort count, and Fuccillo forced Barry Siddall to a good save.

Sunderland's big centre-backs Shaun Elliott and Jack Ashurst dislodged some hard tackles, but with Jim Husband and Ron Futcher often pulling them out towards the flanks, the Town's attacks always looked dangerous, with Fuccillo, Ricky Hill and even Paul Price and Steve Buckley getting into dangerous positions quickly.

Sunderland began to get frustrated as Holden wasted one chance and Greenwood's greed cost two more, and they had a remarkable let-off in the 36th minute.

The Town's neat, short passing continually pulled Sunderland's defensive formation to pieces, and a lovely move down the right put Husband through for a half-chance.

Sharply angled, he had a very narrow target to

aim at, and Siddall was blocking most of it by taking up position on the near post. Husband's football brain beat him — he chipped with delicate precision over the goalkeeper's head, but the ball hit the bar and Sunderland cleared.

But they were in disarray again two minutes before the interval. A corner was part-cleared, and Price slammed in a low shot from outside the box. It was blocked, but Futcher was quickest to react, and turned to hook the Town into the lead from close range.

After the break, with 26,000 voices urging them on, Sunderland were fighting for their pride, but the Town defended well, and it began to look as though they could hold on for victory.

The chance of a second goal came and went when Futcher, West and Hill continued a move that had started in defence. It ended with Hill delivering a tantalising bending cross which tempted Siddall out of his goal and left him stranded. Husband had anticipated it, but couldn't quite make contact.

Sunderland were in a quandary: they had to push forward for the equaliser, yet every time they did they were vulnerable to the Town's high-speed counter-attacks.

It made for a fascinating duel, and although Sunderland's strike force got no change out of the Town defence, the balance was evened in the 34th minute.

Brian Swain reports from Roker Park

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Match Details

SUNDERLAND 1, LUTON TOWN 1
Half-time: 0-1

TOWN: Aleksic; Price, Buckley, Faulkner, McNichol; West, Hill, Fuccillo, Carr; Husband, Ron Futcher. Sub: Ingram, not used.

SUNDERLAND: Siddall; Henderson, Bolton, Elliott, Ashurst; Kerr, Arnott, Rowell; Roston, Greenwood, Holden. Sub: Clarke, not used.

THE GOALS: Ron Futcher for the Town, 43 minutes, after Paul Price 25-yarder was blocked; Joe Bolton for Sunderland, 54 minutes, with 30-yard low drive through a crowded penalty area.

ATTENDANCE: 26,915 — second highest in the Second Division, and better than six First Division gates on Saturday.

REFEREE: John Wrennall, Ecclestone, Lancs: Impeccably impartial, but players of both sides complained of too much whistle.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very good indeed, with the game poised delicately throughout, and both sides going off the field realising that it could have gone either way.

A Sunderland attack was halted, but the ball ran loose to full-back Joe Bolton, and from 30 yards he tried his luck. His shot was inspired or dead lucky — the ball found a way through a crowd of players, and flashed low into the net, scraping the inside of the post.

Such inspiration or luck could not be expected twice in the same game, and the Town never let it interfere with their concentration.

And Sunderland were the first to ease off. They seemed to decide that they could never win the fight in midfield, as West and Fuccillo demonstrated with a lovely inter-change of passes. The move ended with West flicking the ball over a defender's head and into the path of Fuccillo, but an unkind bounce robbed him.

Milija Aleksic's only blemish on a sound per-

formance came when he fumbled a header from Ashurst. The ball trickled into the net some seconds after the whistle had gone for offside.

But the last major goal-mouth scare of the game came at the other end, Hill, who had raised his game the longer the match went on, slid a careful pass through the defence to put West clear, but from an angle he pulled his shot marginally wide of the near post.

And the relief on Sunderland's faces was still visible an hour after the game as manager Adamson expressed his admiration of the Town's style and skill.

His heartwarming words were never more deserved, nor more welcome — the heating system on the team coach had packed up, but the longest trip of the season had all been well worth while.